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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000720

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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: EU DIPLOMATS NOT KEEN ON THIRD
COMMITTEE RESOLUTION

REF: A. TASHKENT 303
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 706
[1](#)C. TASHKENT 361
[1](#)D. TASHKENT 713

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On June 16, poloff hosted another session of a periodic roundtable on human rights issues with Human Rights Watch director Igor Vorontsov and counterparts from the British, French, German, and Czech Embassies. During the meeting, the EU diplomats expressed skepticism about attempting to pass a resolution criticizing Uzbekistan's human rights record during this fall's United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee; described a request for human rights-related assistance the British government received from the Uzbek Embassy in London; explained what they knew so far about procedures for the EU's three-month review in July of visa restrictions against Uzbek officials; and noted the odd juxtaposition of the Uzbeks holding a conference on media freedom the same week that Uzbek television aired a documentary denouncing Radio Free Europe reporters as traitors and authorities arrested a former RFE journalist on drug charges. The French DCM also reported a conversation President Karimov reportedly had with a visiting French human rights ombudsman, in which Karimov reportedly said that he was willing to cooperate bilaterally with European nations on human rights, but would provide negative responses to any EU demarches. In addition, Vorontsov shared with the participants a letter that HRW's main New York office sent to the Justice Ministry requesting that they reconsider their denial of accreditation for Vorontsov. He later informed poloff that HRW Executive Director Kenneth Roth received an Uzbek visa and planned to meet with Uzbek officials in Tashkent on July 3. We agree with the EU diplomats that a Third Committee resolution is likely to fail again this year and is the wrong approach with the Uzbeks, who are increasingly receptive to offers of human rights-related assistance. End summary.

EU DIPLOMATS SKEPTICAL OF THIRD COMMITTEE RESOLUTION

¶2. (C) During the June 16 meeting at the U.S. Embassy, all EU diplomats present expressed skepticism about attempting to pass a United Nations Third Committee Resolution criticizing Uzbekistan's human rights record this year. British Third Secretary Benjamin Greenwood reported some discussion in his Embassy about a possible resolution, but noted that there was "a complete lack of political will" in Whitehall to back such a resolution. French DCM Christophe Le Rigoleur doubted the efficacy of such a resolution, noting that it would "cut across the grain of current EU policy." He also noted that the Uzbek government managed to cobble together a coalition of like-minded countries, mostly from the Arab and developing world, to defeat a proposed Third Committee resolution in 2006 (Note: The United States did not propose a Third Committee Resolution in 2007, believing that it would likely be defeated again. End note.) All of the EU diplomats agreed with Le Rigoleur that the Uzbeks would most likely defeat any resolution proposed again this year. Human Rights Watch director Igor Vorontsov listened to the EU diplomats, but did not express HRW's point of view on a possible Third Committee Resolution. He noted that HRW was preparing a report on Uzbekistan for the UN Human Rights Council's Periodic Review in December, which he said was due in July.

BRITISH GOVERNMENT RECEIVES GOU ASSISTANCE REQUEST

¶3. (C) Greenwood shared with the other diplomats a May 20 letter from Uzbek Ambassador to the United Kingdom Otabek

Akbarov to Foreign and Commonwealth Office Director for Russia, South Caucasus and Central Asia Directorate Michael Davenport, requesting assistance in implementing the government's new laws abolishing the death penalty and introducing habeas corpus. The letter affirmed the Uzbek government's support for bilateral exchanges of experts on penitentiary and law-enforcement structures. Greenwood reported that the British government was preparing to follow up on the Uzbek's request, and in particular, was seeking to send to Uzbekistan a British expert to critique the habeas corpus law. Poloff noted that American experts earlier critiqued the Uzbek's habeas corpus law during an international conference held in Tashkent in March (ref A), and that we were pursuing cooperation with the Uzbeks on providing training for law enforcement officials on implementing the habeas corpus law.

¶4. (C) Le Rigoleur reported that the French government was seeking to institute training for Uzbek law enforcement officials on how to properly conduct anti-terrorism investigations without resorting to human rights abuses, noting that French officials have dealt with the issue since the guerrilla warfare of the Algerian War of Independence. He noted that the Uzbek authorities had agreed to such training in October 2007 pending a visit by a French judge who specialized in the issue, but held off on having the French judge visit Tashkent until a few weeks ago. In addition, Le Rigoleur said that the French government was interested in offering training for law enforcement officials on appropriate crowd-control procedures, and noted that the International Committee of the Red Cross was pursuing similar cooperation.

EU THREE-MONTH SANCTION REVIEW IN JULY

¶5. (C) When asked how the EU would conduct its three-month review in July of its decision from April to suspend EU visa sanctions against selected Uzbek officials for six months, the diplomats noted that this was the first time the EU had instituted a three-month review of sanctions and that it was still unclear how the review would be conducted (Note: The EU's visa sanctions against selected Uzbek officials were first waived for a six-month period in November 2007. End note.) EU Embassies in Tashkent have yet to meet to discuss the issue. The EU diplomats believed that the review would

mostly be a data-collection exercise and involve a factual review of whether the Uzbek government had achieved certain benchmarks on human rights. They noted that the recent release of human rights activist Mutabar Tojiboyeva would work in the government's favor, but not its continued reluctance to permit visits by United Nations Special Rapporteurs on human rights, including the Special Rapporteur for Torture. The EU diplomats said that the review would be completed in July, as Brussels typically closes down in August. The EU would then already begin its ordinary six-month review of sanctions for October in September.

STRANGE JUXTAPOSITION OF MEDIA-RELATED EVENTS

¶16. (C) All of the EU diplomats and Vorontsov expressed puzzlement over the government's recent actions in regards to media, noting that the very same week the government held an international conference on media freedom on June 9-10, Uzbek state-TV ran a program attacking Radio Free Europe journalists and authorities arrested a former RFE reporter in Karakalpakstan on drug charges (ref B). None of the EU diplomats attended the government's conference, which they dismissed as propaganda. Originally, the EU was to co-sponsor the media conference, but pulled out after the Uzbeks rejected the participation of several independent

journalists and human rights activists. Greenwood reported that the EU would try to hold the conference again in September.

¶17. (C) Greenwood reported that authorities denied accreditation for Reuters stringer Shamil Baygin a few weeks ago. He also observed that a BBC journalist in Almaty, a Georgian citizen, has tried for over a year to received accreditation in Uzbekistan without success. In March, authorities denied accreditation for AP stringer Khusnuddin Kutbiddinov (ref C).

¶18. (C) Comment: We are equally perplexed by the government's actions on media in recent weeks, which also resembles the "one-step-forward, one-step back approach" the government has displayed recently in regards to religious freedom. Shortly before Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom John Hanford's recent visit, authorities ramped up a recent campaign against certain Protestant congregations, including showing a video on Uzbek television accusing them of using psychotropic drugs to lure in potential converts. Nevertheless, during Hanford's visit, the Uzbeks agreed to engage in a substantive dialogue on religious freedom (ref D). We believe that the government's recent contradictory actions on human rights are possibly indicative of a struggle between different factions, perhaps between those who favor closer relations with the West and are willing to make concessions on human rights, and others who favor stronger relations with Russia. It is possible that the latter group sees bad press for Uzbekistan on human rights as a tool that could be exploited to drive a wedge between Uzbekistan and the West. End comment.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH SENDS LETTER TO JUSTICE MINISTRY

¶19. (C) HRW Director Vorontsov shared with participants a letter dated June 12 that HRW Executive Director Kenneth Roth and HRW Europe and Central Asia Division Director Holly Cartner sent to the Justice Ministry, which had denied Vorontsov accreditation in May, claiming that Vorontsov did not understand the region and "mentality of the Uzbek people." The short letter expressed Roth and Cartner's disappointment and puzzlement over the Ministry's decision and asked the Ministry to reconsider, stressing Vorontsov's (obvious) qualifications for the position.

KARIMOV WILLING TO COOPERATE BILATERALLY, BUT NOT WITH EU

¶10. (C) Le Rigoleur described for Vorontsov the actions that

the EU and his Embassy have taken to try to convince the Uzbeks to reverse their decision on his accreditation. During a recent meeting between President Karimov and the French Human Rights Ombudsman, Karimov reportedly told the French Ombudsman that he is ready to engage bilaterally with EU countries on human rights and other issues. According to Le Rigoleur, though, Karimov also warned that "any EU demarche will lead to a negative answer." As a result, the French Embassy followed-up an EU demarche on HRW's behalf to the MFA's United Nations and International Organizations department on June 6 with bilateral demarches to First Deputy Foreign Minister Ilkhom Nematov and the MFA Department for Europe. Specifically, the French asked the Uzbeks to grant Vorontsov accreditation on the basis of a "six-month trial period" (Note: The Ambassador, as well as Assistant Secretary Boucher during his recent visit to Uzbekistan, also intervened with Uzbek authorities on Vorontsov's behalf. End note.)

HRW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PLANS UZBEKISTAN VISIT

¶11. (C) On June 19, Vorontsov told poloff that Roth and Cartner recently applied for Uzbek visas and were hoping to discuss Vorontsov's accreditation issue with Uzbek officials on July 3. On June 20, the Ambassador weighed in with MFA America's Division Chief Mamadjanov in support of granting Roth and Cartner Uzbek visas. On June 23, Vorontsov reported to poloff that both Roth and Cartner had been issued Uzbek visas (Comment: We believe that Roth and Cartner's planned trip is HRW's last ditch effort to convince the Uzbeks to accredit Vorontsov. Though the Uzbeks have left door open for HRW to put forward another candidate for Vorontsov's position, our sense from discussions with Vorontsov is that HRW will sooner close its office in Tashkent than put forward a new candidate. End comment.)

VORONTSOV DEPARTS UZBEKISTAN, TEMPORARILY....

¶12. (C) Vorontsov departed Tashkent on June 20 on work-related matters to Kyrgyzstan and Europe. As Vorontsov explained to poloff, his departure is not yet permanent. If Vorontsov is not granted accreditation, he will remain HRW's point person on Uzbekistan, but will report from Bishkek, with possible short trips to Tashkent (according to Vorontsov, as a Russian citizen, there is nothing in Uzbek law that would prevent him from occasionally traveling to Uzbekistan.)

COMMENT

¶13. (C) We share with the EU diplomats skepticism about the efficacy of attempting to pass a Third Committee Resolution against Uzbekistan this year. First, we believe that such a "naming and shaming" approach is ineffective with a country like Uzbekistan, whose leaders are highly reluctant to "lose face" by appearing to bow down to political pressure from the West on human rights. Secondly, the Uzbek government is likely to rally a coalition of like-minded countries to defeat any proposed resolution this year, as they did in ¶2006. Rather than seeking to "name and shame" Uzbekistan through a Third Committee resolution that is likely to fail anyway, we instead believe the government would be more receptive to offers of human rights-related assistance. The Uzbek government's recent approach to the British government, for example, illustrates that the government is receptive to such offers of assistance, which we believe represent the best way forward on improving human rights in Uzbekistan.

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